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Down to the core

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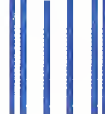
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Peggy Boyer Long



The Statehouse is where federal and local policy meet, and where leadership can make a difference

by Peggy Boyer Long

It's tough being a governor these days. There's no question about that.

Nationwide, states are facing their worst fiscal crises in more than 50 years. And some say Illinois is facing its worst ever. That's a bit of political hyperbole, perhaps, but not far off the mark. Times are grim.

Going into his first state budget, Gov. Rod Blagojevich is staring down a \$1.2 billion hole. His estimate. By the end of the budget year that begins this summer, he'll have to fill another \$3.6 billion hole. Again, his estimate.

But if that isn't challenge enough, the new governor is about to learn that all roads lead, inevitably, to the Statehouse. The feds are sending more policy mandates out of Washington, D.C. And local officials are calling on Springfield to send more help. In short, Illinois' new administration is about to get squeezed from both sides. And providing services to this state's citizens could get even more expensive.

Illinois Issues details this month

Going into his first state budget, Gov. Rod Blagojevich is staring down a \$1.2 billion hole. His estimate. By the end of the budget year that begins this summer, he'll have to fill another \$3.6 billion hole. Again, his estimate.

the policy and financial pressures on the state from federal and local officials.

The costs of new federal policy initiatives, for instance, have yet to be tabulated. So the states have a number of concerns about President George W. Bush's federal budget plan for fiscal year 2004, which begins next fall. Medicaid, reports Aaron Chambers, tops the list.

If the president has his way, Chambers writes, the burden

of keeping booming Medicaid costs under control will be on the states. And here in Illinois, as elsewhere, that program, which funds health care for low-income citizens, constitutes one of the greatest pressures on a governor's budget.

In fact, Illinois' program has grown by about 8 percent each year over the past decade. The rising cost of prescription drugs is largely responsible for driving those increases. Illinois serves about 1.6 million Medicaid recipients; not counting administration, the program cost about \$4.7 billion in state dollars in the fiscal year that ended last June.

Under the current formula, the federal government reimburses Illinois 50 cents for every dollar it spends. But under the Bush plan — if the state signs on — the feds would allot a set sum each year and Illinois would have to cover any additional program spending.

The Bush Administration, which argues the plan encourages careful oversight, is offering incentives to sign on. States that opt in will get an

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extra \$12.7 billion over the first seven years of the 10-year program. Beyond that, they'll need to find ways to keep expenses in check.

"State officials in Illinois and elsewhere," Chambers writes, "are loath to predict to what extent Medicaid spending will grow over the next decade."

There are uncertainties in the proposed federal plan, too. A state's allotment would be increased each year under an inflationary rate. But that rate has yet to be determined.

While Blagojevich doesn't support the president's Medicaid plan, he hasn't said whether Illinois will opt in or out. But, his budget proposal for this next fiscal year is expected to assume the current Medicaid formula will remain in place.

Still, while the fiscal risks for states in signing on may be high in the long-run, governors may need those spending bonuses in the short term. And the White House may be counting on that.

The White House also may be counting on a political bonus in its education initiative: the program dubbed with the catchy phrase, "No Child Left Behind."

Maureen Foertsch McKinney assesses this and other education reform proposals in her essay. "Politicians want to claim to be catalysts for change," she writes. "But change driven by ambition may not help children if policy-makers put no resources behind the big ideas."

A couple of things are clear about this latest initiative. Bush has managed to greatly expand the role of the federal government in public schools. And he has managed to increase costs for the states over the long haul.

No Child Left Behind requires annual performance evaluations and gives parents the chance to opt out of schools that don't perform.

Under this new federal law, states are required to test every student in grades three through eight, double the number of annual standardized tests that have been required by Illinois.

No Child Left Behind, McKinney concludes, has a grand vision and does seem to be aimed at giving every child a good education. "That philosophy is a step in the right direction."

But the task is daunting for Illinois at a time when its schools are in fiscal crisis.

Indeed, local districts are increasingly looking to the state for help in avoiding deficit spending or outright bankruptcy. Bethany Warner reports that at least 74 percent, or 657 of Illinois' 892 school districts, spend more than they take in, and the state education board expects that figure to grow to 80 percent or more by the end of this school year.

Those districts are unlikely to get relief from local property taxpayers. Getting it from the state is unlikely, too.

While he has promised not to cut spending for elementary and secondary schools, Blagojevich is likely to have few dollars to spare for bailouts. And because he has promised not to increase state income or sales taxes, he won't have the funds that would be required to increase the state's share of total school spending.

The governor will get the chance to tell us how he intends to weigh these competing and worthy interests when he announces his first budget. He won't have it easy.

It's tough being a governor these days. The Statehouse is where federal and local policy meet, and where leadership can make the greatest difference in Illinoisans' lives, for better or worse.

We'll keep you posted. □

Peggy Boyer Long can be reached at peggyboy@aol.com.

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The governor is expected to take the lead on setting spending priorities

by Aaron Chambers

Lawmakers resurrected a classic phrase to express their wonderment over Gov. Rod Blagojevich's approach to dealing with the ailing state budget: Where's the beef?

No, they're not hoping for bigger hamburger patties, as burger lovers were in the Wendy's commercials that made the saying famous. They want to know just how the Democrat intends to deal with a deficit he estimates at a combined \$4.8 billion for this fiscal year and the one that begins July 1.

The beef should arrive this month. Blagojevich is scheduled to deliver his budget proposal for the next fiscal year on the 9th. Under the Illinois Constitution, that budget plan must be balanced. So Blagojevich must reconcile the shortfall he projects to be \$3.6 billion in fiscal year 2004. At the same time, he is expected to deal with the projected \$1.2 billion budget hole in the rest of this fiscal year.

The General Assembly must approve the state budget, of course. But the process in Illinois is executive driven. So the governor is expected to take the lead on setting spending priorities — and making the tough decisions necessary to correct the imbalance.

There are other, nonbudgetary concerns about the governor's vision. For instance, Rep. Art Turner, a Chicago Democrat, says that while

There's growing sentiment that this governor is stalling on the hard choices. Fueling that perception, Blagojevich used his State of the State address last month to propose new spending.

he appreciates the governor's desire to focus law enforcement resources on battling ecstasy, the so-called club drug popular among young white suburbanites, he hopes adequate resources will be devoted to fighting crack-cocaine, a more pressing problem among his African-American constituents on the city's West Side.

Still, the budget is foremost on most minds at the Capitol. And, for legislators, the governor's action this month won't come too soon: There's growing sentiment that this governor is stalling on the hard choices. Fueling that perception, Blagojevich used his State of the State address last month to propose new spending.

This would include \$24.9 million to establish "universal preschool,"

\$24 million to reopen Sheridan Correctional Center in LaSalle County to house drug offenders and \$24 million to expand the state's Family Care program, which provides health insurance for the poor.

Though the tag he attached to the package, \$88 million for the next fiscal year, is substantially less than the estimated \$800 million worth of promises he made during last year's campaign, critics nonetheless charge that it was irresponsible to discuss more spending before outlining a budget plan.

Blagojevich insists that fulfilling campaign promises and balancing the budget are not mutually exclusive.

And the governor has taken steps to save the state money. He ordered agencies and departments under his command to cut 10 percent of administrative spending, a move Blagojevich officials say could save \$125 million in fiscal year 2004. He also directed those agencies to reserve 8 percent of their fiscal year 2003 operating funds, 10 percent of capital improvement funds and 5 percent of grant and award dollars. The governor's office is reviewing and prioritizing those programs, estimated at \$1.7 billion.

The governor asked public universities to present him with scenarios for cutting spending from their budgets. Those cost saving proposals were due

to the governor by mid-March.

He limited to five the number of unused vacation days state employees can roll into another year. Responding to a news report, he said some 140 state employees who retired last year cashed in vacation time for lump sums, in some cases exceeding \$60,000.

The governor also has proposed an ambitious plan to "refinance" the state's pension obligations. Essentially, he proposes selling \$10 billion worth of bonds, investing the revenue and paying pension obligations with the interest earned on those investments.

His aides say the plan, if approved by the legislature and accepted by brokerage houses on Wall Street, could save the state \$300 million this fiscal year and \$1.6 billion next fiscal year.

The bonds would be sold in \$2 million to \$4 million increments over a period of months, according to the governor's budget bureau. The proceeds would be invested in stocks, real estate and equities. And the bonds likely would be paid off over 30 years.

"This is far, far preferable to raising taxes," says Blagojevich, who maintains he won't raise income or sales taxes to shore up the budget.

The budget bureau was fleshing out details of the bonding plan at press time in mid-March. So it's unclear exactly how the proposal, if implemented, would affect the budget.

Much depends on how the scheme is structured. For instance, would debt service be backloaded so that heftier payments are required in later years? That's how New Jersey structured a similar plan in 1997. As a result, administration officials there say, the state increasingly struggles to make payments. "It has caused tremendous increases in our future and present debt service," says Matthew Golden, spokesman for that state's Department of the Treasury.

Blagojevich has secured key support for his bonding concept, nevertheless. Senate President Emil Jones Jr. and House Speaker Michael Madigan, Chicago Democrats, back the plan.

Still, bonding measures require a three-fifths vote in the legislature. Though Republicans are in the

Blagojevich retorts that his administration is, in fact, off to a quick start. "I think the grumbling you're seeing is that some who are entrenched, who are part of the status quo, don't like the reforms we've talked about and we've announced."

minority in both chambers, their support will be necessary.

And GOP legislators have spent the spring session complaining about what they call Blagojevich's reluctance to deal directly with the budget deficit. Specifically, they charge that he should deal with the current fiscal year before outlining plans for the next one.

"We've got a tremendous problem and that problem is today," says Senate Minority Leader Frank Watson, a Greenville Republican. "It's a fiscal year '03 problem that doesn't seem to get his attention."

There are immediate ramifications to the current shortfall. As of mid-March, the Illinois comptroller's office, which pays the state's bills, was holding more than 241,000 of them totaling \$1.6 billion. The longest wait for payment to vendors was 41 business days.

Republicans also complain the governor has not reached out to them for feedback on his developing plans. "I can't really comment honestly because my comments are coming off the top of my head," says state Treasurer Judy Baar Topinka, chair of the Illinois Republican Party. "If mine are coming off the top of my head and his are coming from the hip, we've got this anatomical discussion going on that doesn't necessarily add up to a budget."

Meanwhile, lawmakers are moving ahead with spending proposals of their own. This could put additional

pressure on the governor to incorporate additional spending. The House Republican caucus estimates some \$65 million in spending measures have been approved by that chamber.

Democrats also have been cool to Blagojevich's approach but have not been as harsh in their criticism. Many in the governor's party were disappointed that his State of the State failed to deal directly with the budget.

"It was a feel good speech for the people of Illinois," says Sen. Donne Trotter, a Chicago Democrat and chief budget negotiator for his caucus. "But I think people are a bit antsy about what his spending plans are going to be. We heard about the needs of our state, but there was no meat to it."

Blagojevich retorts that his administration is, in fact, off to a quick start. "I think the grumbling you're seeing is that some who are entrenched, who are part of the status quo, don't like the reforms we've talked about and we've announced."

The Blagojevich Administration also has stepped up criticism of George Ryan, the governor's predecessor. Last month, Blagojevich took to raising Ryan's name during each public appearance, and blaming him for the budget situation: "Nobody was more popular in the Springfield environment than Gov. Ryan. He didn't say no to anybody; he said yes to everybody. And now we've got a \$5 billion deficit."

Blagojevich Budget Director John Filan, during a press conference in February, traced the budget deficit to fiscal irresponsibility during Ryan's four years. Despite declining revenues in the latter part of the administration, Filan said, lawmakers and the governor continued to build new spending into the budget.

"Not only is that troublesome from a pure dollar point of view, but that spending, once it gets in the base, it's very difficult to get out," he said. "So consequently, once you're there it's hard to pull back."

The Blagojevich team didn't cause the damage. But this month they must fix it. □

Aaron Chambers can be reached at statehousebureau@aol.com.

BRIEFLY

PRAIRIE POTHOLES

Courtesy of Michael Jeffords

Third time could be charm for wetlands legislation

Potholes have advocates in Illinois. State Rep. Karen May is again pushing to save so-called prairie potholes, those isolated wetlands left unprotected by a 2001 U.S. Supreme Court ruling. The Highland Park Democrat is sponsoring a measure aimed at mending disagreements over legislation defeated in the past two spring sessions of the General Assembly (see *Illinois Issues*, July/August 2001, page 25).

This time, though, various groups with a stake in the outcome have been meeting to negotiate an agreement. Illinois House Speaker Michael Madigan asked former state representative and retired Judge Michael Getty to mediate the discussions among industry, environmentalists, several counties and the state.

"I believe there is a good chance we will pass some sort of wetland protection in April," May says.

She says the negotiators have made progress. As of mid-March, though, there were still two major disagreements: which state agency would regulate isolated wetlands and whether statewide rules would pre-empt local authority.

A group representing business interests argues the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency should regulate isolated wetlands. "The IEPA has a structure in place that is time- and litigation-tested," says Alec Messina, counsel for the Illinois Environmental Regulatory Group, a coalition that includes the Illinois Chamber of Commerce, the Illinois Manufacturers' Association and the Illinois Farm Bureau. "It is not necessary to reinvent the wheel."

Nevertheless, May says she found that would be the case if the state EPA were put in charge of isolated wetlands. "When I first proposed this legislation two years ago, I went to the IEPA, and they told me we would be creating a whole new bureaucracy there because

they don't know anything about wetlands."

That's the argument, too, of environmental groups.

"The Department of Natural Resources is better equipped to regulate isolated wetlands," says Carl Becker, public lands director of the Illinois chapter of The Nature Conservancy. "Decisions should be based on science." He notes that within the natural resources department are biologists and other scientists with the Illinois Natural History Survey and the Office of Water Resources. "DNR has a field-based organization of biologists and engineers who can deliver services to those seeking permits."

The business group argues the IEPA already issues water quality certification in connection with federally issued permits for those wetlands that are connected to other bodies of water. And they say the current proposal is intended to fill the gap created by the Supreme Court decision, not create a duplicative or overlapping set of regulations.

That is another sticking point. The industry group wants rules regarding isolated wetlands to be consistent statewide, which would mean pre-empting local control. Messina says members of his coalition deal with property throughout the state, and they would like to know they will be treated the same regardless of project location. DuPage, Lake and Kane counties already have rules that protect isolated wetlands, ponds and streams. "DuPage County wants to protect all wetlands, regardless of size or quality, because of flooding problems," says Becker.

Indeed, May says DuPage County has



This American Toad is calling for a mate from a wetland.

spent more than \$100 million on wetland protection, primarily for flood control. Wetlands act like sponges that soak up excess water. They also filter drain water and recharge underground aquifers. She says Illinoisans spend more than \$40 million a year on repairing flood damage, whereas a wetlands program in Massachusetts saved that state \$17 million.

Lake County, too, sees wetlands as flood protection. That county has more wetlands than any county in the state, says Joe Hmielecki, wetlands specialist for the Lake County Storm Water Commission. Two years ago, officials there worked out a plan with business leaders and developers to protect isolated wetlands. Hmielecki doesn't think it's practical to apply a uniform standard statewide because "it doesn't fit for Illinois." The state's topography is too varied from north to south, he says. "A uniform standard would weaken our protections, yet it would be too strong for some areas downstate."

May's measure, a salute to Earth Day, was approved by committee as a "shell" bill, meaning she is waiting for the various groups to reach consensus.

"This is an important environmental issue," she says, "but it's about more than caring about the habitat of plants and animals. This legislation concerns citizens across the state."

Beverly Scobell

Lawmakers take up reforms

Lawmakers are moving measures to reform administration of the death penalty and, in one instance, abolish it altogether.

The abolition bill, sponsored by Rep. Art Turner, a Chicago Democrat, was approved by a House committee early last month and in mid-March was scheduled for debate by the full chamber. The measure's prospects aren't strong. In any case, Gov. Rod Blagojevich says he will veto the legislation should it be approved by the General Assembly.

A measure designed to guard against executing innocent people stands a better chance. The package, sponsored by Sen. John Cullerton, a Chicago Democrat, includes some of the proposals advanced by a commission former Gov. George Ryan formed. It would, among other provisions, bar the death penalty for someone convicted solely on testimony of a so-called jailhouse informant, give the Illinois Supreme Court broad powers to overturn death sentences and expand a convict's ability to present new evidence of innocence. That measure was approved by a Senate committee early last month.

A related bill, sponsored by Chicago Democratic Sen. Barack Obama, also was approved by committee. It would require investigators to videotape or audiotape interrogations in murder cases. Blagojevich says he has "reservations, but I can be persuaded so long as the law enforcement piece and the practical aspects of it are considered."

Legislation backed by Cook County State's Attorney Dick Devine that would eliminate five of the 21 death-eligibility factors also passed committee. The five are murders committed in the course of a hijacking, in the course of one of several drug offenses, while incarcerated, during a drive-by shooting and when the defendant, as head of a criminal drug conspiracy, orders the death (see *Illinois Issues*, October 2001, page 30).

Aaron Chambers

The debate over retardation

Illinois and other states cannot execute mentally retarded individuals. The U.S. Supreme Court made that clear in an opinion last June (see *Illinois Issues*, June 2002, page 22).

But the justices left it up to the states to define mental retardation. The General Assembly took the matter up this spring, and the outcome of that debate will determine which defendants can assert this condition to stay off Death Row. At issue is whether to provide a narrow definition sought by prosecutors, which would apply to fewer defendants, or a broader definition sought by criminal defense attorneys, which would apply to more.

The central controversy is how much weight a defendant's IQ should have in determining retardation. State's attorneys want the determination to include IQ score and functioning, but IQ must be 70 or lower to qualify. Criminal defense attorneys, on the other hand, argue a defendant's overall adaptive functioning, which affects how much retarded individuals can help with their own defense, should take precedence over IQ. The two sides agree retardation must manifest itself before age 18.

Legislation pending in the Senate would set a 75 IQ score as presumptive evidence of retardation, allowing a prosecutor to successfully argue that a defendant with an IQ lower than 75 is not retarded. A House bill does not include an IQ score in the definition.

Lawmakers also must determine at what point in trial a defendant should be tested. Criminal defense attorneys argue testing should occur before trial to avoid running a mentally retarded defendant through a rigorous three-phase capital trial. Prosecutors want testing to occur during the sentencing phase.

Bethany K. Warner

LEGI CHECKLIST

The estimated \$4.8 billion budget deficit has not stopped lawmakers from moving spending measures. Legislators are approving them with the recognition that funding may not be available. Many of the big-ticket items, such as an effort to expand gambling, are still under discussion and have not been subject to a formal vote. Both chambers had deadlines for moving bills out of committee by the end of March.

Environment

West Nile Virus-carrying mosquitoes are the target of legislation to assist state agencies in preventing outbreaks. Three measures would create a fund from taxes on used tire sales to be

divvied among six agencies to clean up used tires — a breeding ground for mosquitoes — and to study infected mosquito populations. In 2002, Illinois led the nation in West Nile cases with 877 cases of human infection, including 62 deaths.

Meanwhile, solar and wind power generation would increase if utilities are required to provide a percentage of their power from alternate sources (see *Illinois Issues*, July/August 2002, page 28). Two identical measures set a schedule for utilities to increase that percentage from 2 percent in 2005 to 15 percent by 2020.

Health care

Middle-income seniors and the disabled could save hundreds on med-

ication with a \$25-a-year prescription drug discount card. Senate sponsor Debbie DeFrancesco Halvorson, a Crete Democrat, says reducing medication costs is necessary so that seniors "don't have to decide between prescription drugs, food and utilities." A similar measure, sponsored by Rep. Jack Franks, a Woodstock Democrat, is advancing in the House.

Last month, Gov. Rod Blagojevich created a new advocate position for negotiating lower prices for prescription drugs bought by the state. He also pledged to expand the Circuit Breaker program to cover all prescriptions for needy seniors.

Criminal justice

Law enforcement officials would

be required to file police reports from victims of identity theft under a House measure (see *Illinois Issues*, March 2001, page 15). Victims of identity theft also could secure a court certificate that they are innocent of crimes committed in their names. A second measure would force creditors to verify the address and personal information on a credit application if it does not match what's on an individual's credit report. Attorney General Lisa Madigan endorses both measures, which were approved by committee.

Officers making traffic stops would be required to record the gender and race of those they pull over as part of a study of racial profiling proposed by Sen. Barack Obama, a Chicago Democrat. The bill, which was approved by committee, also would require training for police about racial issues. A similar House measure, sponsored by Rep. Monique Davis, a Chicago Democrat, has failed twice to win committee approval.

✓ **Wages**

Minimum wage workers would get heftier paychecks if the state's minimum wage is raised from \$5.15 to \$6.50 an hour. The bill is sponsored by Sens. Kimberly Lightford, a Maywood Democrat, and Carol Ronen, a Chicago Democrat.

According to a study by the Center for Urban Economic Development, 12.5 percent of the Illinois workforce earns minimum or near-minimum wage. The average full-time minimum wage worker grosses only 58 percent of the federal poverty level for a family of four.

Though small-business interests oppose the increase, Blagojevich favors the wage hike. He also supports a Senate bill requiring women's wages to be equal with men's for the same work.

✓ **Gay rights**

For the first time, legislation banning discrimination based on sexual orientation was approved by a Senate committee. Proponents are hopeful the legislation will be called for a vote

before the full Senate. Still, some senators who voted for the measure in committee are hesitant to vote for it on the floor. Previous attempts got out of the House, but were killed in the Senate.

✓ **Higher Education**

Legislative scholarships would be eliminated under a measure sponsored by Rep. Naomi Jakobsson, an Urbana Democrat. Critics contend lawmakers dole out these scholarships to campaign contributors. Banning the scholarships, Jakobsson says, gets rid of "corruption or what seems like corruption" (see *Illinois Issues*, May 1996, page 22). Legislative scholarships cost the University of Illinois \$4 million last year because no money follows the scholarship to the school.

Blagojevich favors abolishing them.


Limits on tuition at state universities also are pending before the House. One measure would cap the percentage increase each year. Another would lock in a student's tuition for four years. "I call it 'truth in tuition,'" says

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Rep. Kevin Joyce, a Chicago Democrat. Western Illinois University is the only public school in the state to offer this rate guarantee.

Universities may get their budgets in line-items instead of lump-sums under a proposal by Rep. Kurt Granberg, a Carlyle Democrat, who says it is designed to increase accountability (see *Illinois Issues*, February 2003, page 19). Blagojevich also favors line-item budgets for higher education. But Tom Hardy, a University of Illinois spokesman, is concerned the switch might reduce the university's ability to manage its finances during the budget crunch. The Illinois Board of Higher Education does not object to line-item budgets, as long as universities retain some freedom to reallocate funds if necessary.



Ethics

Reform packages have been introduced in both chambers to change the structure of the state's

ethics boards and more clearly define when state employees are permitted to do political work. Legislation sponsored by Sen. Susan Garrett, a Lake Forest Democrat, and Rep. John Fritchey, a Chicago Democrat, would consolidate the six executive ethics commissions into one for the entire executive branch and give it more authority to investigate complaints. Fritchey expects the reforms will pass because the ramifications of the trial of Scott Fawell, he says, "are reverberating very loudly under the dome."



Tobacco

Local governments may get more freedom to regulate smoking in public places (see *Illinois Issues*, Feb. 2003, page 8). Current law prohibits most municipalities from enacting smoking bans tougher than state regulations. Under a House measure, local governments would have the authority to ban smoking in all public places, including

bars and restaurants. The proposal was approved by the House last year, but died in the Senate where smoking is permitted on the chamber floor.

Teenagers may have to wait one more year to buy tobacco products. A House measure would raise the purchasing age from 18 to 19. According to the American Lung Association of Illinois, each year almost 35,000 people under age 18 in this state become daily smokers.



Illinois State Library

A resolution to rename the Illinois State Library after Gwendolyn Brooks unanimously passed the House and is awaiting approval in the Senate. Brooks was the state's second poet laureate, poet laureate for the United States Library of Congress and the first African American to win a Nobel Prize for Literature. She died in September 2000.

Bethany K. Warner

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BRIEFLY

COMMUTATIONS Moves to overturn

Prosecutors want former Death Row inmates to face execution. In several lawsuits filed in the wake of former Gov. George Ryan's blanket clemency in January, they charge that he lacked constitutional authority to commute the sentences of every condemned inmate.

Those challenges are pending before the Illinois Supreme Court, Cook County Circuit Court and other circuit courts.

Attorney General Lisa Madigan and Cook County State's Attorney Richard Devine filed similar actions asking courts to reverse commutations with respect to two categories of inmates: the "unsentenced," or those who were awaiting resentencing after their death sentences were overturned on appeal, and the "unsigned," or those who failed to sign petitions for clemency. They argue the "unsigned" were not entitled to clemency because

statute requires prisoners seeking clemency to sign clemency petitions. With regard to the "unsentenced," the prosecutors note the Illinois Constitution permits the governor to grant clemency "after conviction." Under Illinois law, they argue, "conviction" is not achieved until a defendant is sentenced.

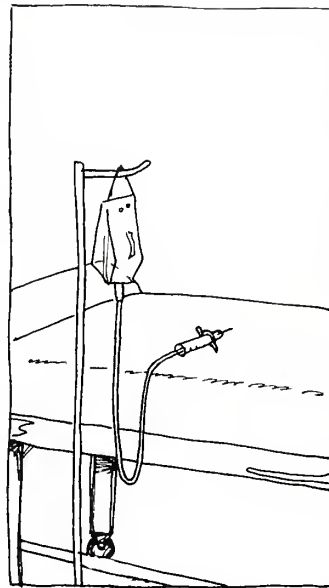
In separate actions, DuPage County State's Attorney Joe Birkett, Peoria County State's Attorney Kevin Lyons and other state's attorneys are seeking to reverse the blanket clemency. They argue Ryan violated the Illinois Constitution's separation of powers clause by usurping the power of the

General Assembly and the courts.

"If you look at the language of the Constitution, no one can question the governor's power to grant clemency — a commutation, a pardon or a reprieve — on an individual case," Birkett says. "But this was not a commutation; this was a nullification of the law and a nullification of the decisions of juries and judges without reference to the facts of the case."

State Appellate Defender Ted Gottfried, whose office represents the bulk of the inmates, is defending the former governor's action. His attorneys argue Ryan acted within his constitutional authority.

Illustration by Mike Cramer



Aaron Chambers



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Quotable

“I can't really comment honestly because my comments are coming off the top of my head. If mine are coming off the top of my head and his are coming from the hip, we've got this anatomical discussion going on that doesn't necessarily add up to a budget.”

State Treasurer Judy Baar Topinka complaining to Illinois Issues that Gov. Rod Blagojevich has failed to show how he would pay for new programs and balance the budget.

Updates

- Chicago Metropolis 2020, a coalition of business and civic leaders, called for consolidation of major transportation agencies in Illinois, including Metra and the Illinois State Toll Highway Authority, to better serve the Chicago area's long-term prosperity (see *Illinois Issues*, February, page 6).
- An American Bar Association committee called on states to finance judicial campaigns with public funds to alleviate the perceived impropriety associated with judicial candidates taking contributions from individuals and organizations interested in cases a judicial candidate could decide (see *Illinois Issues*, October 2000, page 14).

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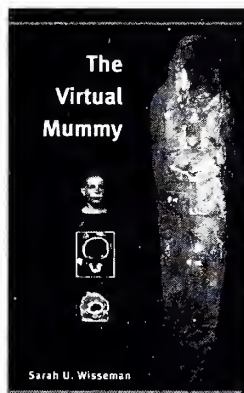
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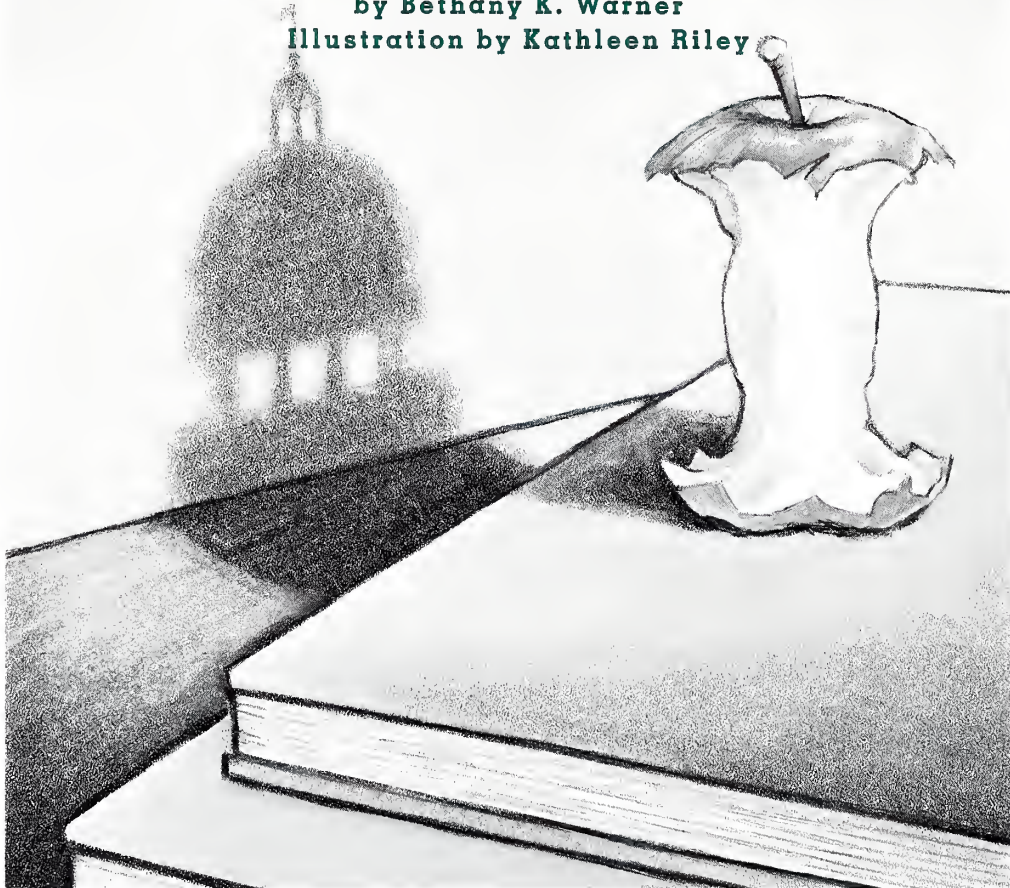
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Down to the core

The rotten economy is eating school budgets.
As more districts go bankrupt, will the state help?

by Bethany K. Warner
Illustration by Kathleen Riley



Construction paper isn't in much demand in Carlinville's schools because elementary students can no longer take art. The teaching staff was cut by more than 17 percent, forcing class sizes to climb at all elementary grades. The average fourth-grade class size is now 29.

The district has had to take several such steps over the past three years to reduce its budget deficit.

Yet even with these economies, Superintendent Michael Collins had to borrow \$750,000 in the 2001-02 school year to cover operations. That debt had to be paid back this year. But, facing rising personnel costs, Carlinville Unit School District 1 in the central Illinois county of Macoupin will have to borrow as much as another \$1.7 million

this spring just to finish out the year. And if voters turn down an April 1 referendum calling for a \$1.3 million property tax levy boost, Collins is expecting to have to make another \$1 million in cuts, leaving, he says, only "a shell of a school district."

Rural Carlinville's plight mirrors problems faced by school districts throughout the state, including New Trier in the wealthy North Shore suburb of Winnetka and such northern urban districts as Elgin, which faces a whopping \$56 million deficit.

Collins and some 118 other superintendents have been counting on local taxpayer support for tax and bond referenda this month. But if history is any guide, their chances are slim. Five referenda were on the ballot in February.

All failed. And last November, only about a quarter of 88 tax- or bond-related school referenda were approved, the lowest percentage in the past decade.

Now Illinois school districts are increasingly looking to the state for help in avoiding deficit spending or outright bankruptcy because a growing number of them are in trouble. At least 74 percent, or 657 of Illinois' 892 school districts, spend more than they take in, and the state board expects that figure to grow to 80 percent or more by the end of this school year.

"If local referenda do not pass this spring and we are unable to do something to correct the foundations that we have for funding [schools], then we are going to see this crisis exploding at us in the years to come," state

schools Superintendent Robert Schiller warned lawmakers.

In fact, school officials are putting on a full-court press this legislative session for an increase in the state's share of elementary and secondary education spending. But chances of getting much help from Springfield are slim, too. The state faces a \$4.8 billion deficit of its own through the next fiscal year. True, some legislators are floating proposals to change the way Illinois schools are funded, but those proposals would require a hike in state taxes. Gov. Rod Blagojevich says he won't raise income or sales taxes.

"This is a tough year, and everybody knows it," says state Rep. Jerry Mitchell, a Sterling Republican and the minority spokesman for the House Elementary and Secondary Education Appropriations Committee.

Meanwhile, an increasing number of school districts are expected to borrow to cover their expenses. They're permitted by state law to do that, but hardships in some districts have led them to borrow at the maximum allowable level. Even this wasn't sufficient to help two districts. Hazel Crest School District 152 1/2 in a poor and primarily black south suburb of Chicago and Cairo Unit School District 1 in the far southern region of the state approached bankruptcy within the past few months.

Had the state not provided emergency financial assistance to Hazel Crest, the district would have had to shut its doors before the end of the school year. In November, the state established an oversight panel for that Cook County district, but matters didn't improve and private lenders refused to provide more dollars. In early December, lawmakers and former Gov. George Ryan agreed to loan Hazel Crest \$4.4 million. The district will have to pay this loan back. In the meantime, the state controls the district's checkbook through the oversight committee. Similar controls were already in place for the Round Lake district in the far northeastern corner of the state.

In early February, Cairo turned to the state education board for financial oversight. This means the state must approve the district's budgets, as it currently does for the Livingston and

East St. Louis districts. Cairo schools, which serve a student population that is 85 percent black and 85 percent low-income, had accrued more than \$3 million in combined short- and long-term debt.

That district's financial woes didn't appear overnight, of course. Cairo Superintendent Robert Isom says it was borrowing against tax revenues to pay operating costs. But the combination of reduced state assistance resulting from school days lost during a strike last year, buildings that had to be repaired and the failure of November's \$4.1 million bond referendum pushed the district to seek help. "Without external resources and assistance, we were going to be insolvent. It would be almost impossible to say we're running an education program," says Isom.

The financial problems faced by Cairo and Hazel Crest also raised questions about the state's monitoring program. The state board knew about Cairo, yet the district didn't appear on its 2002 financial watch list. In fact, Cairo had been removed from the previous year's list. Hazel Crest was not on the list either.

To better assess the fiscal health of school districts, the board is instituting a new formula. Instead of merely comparing a district's expenditures to its cash balance, the board will weigh other factors, including revenue and borrowing. To use an analogy, the old formula was like seeing whether a homeowner pays the utility bills. If the lights were on, everything was considered OK. But the old formula could miss the reality that a homeowner might be taking out a home equity loan to cover the groceries.

An assessment of the new factors could lead to a spot on the state's warning list — meaning the board recommends certain financial practices — or on its watch list — meaning the board requires those practices. "It's a more holistic analysis," says Gary Ey, the state board's financial manager. "We're going to throw that net out there, and catch a lot of districts." Indeed, this new approach is highlighting additional problems. More than 200 districts appear on the new financial warning and watch lists. The old formula recognized only 11 struggling districts.

Yet districts that don't appear on the list are struggling, too. They are looking at cost-cutting measures to stave off deficits. Most of those cuts will come in programs and staffing. Springfield Public School District 186 in the central region, for instance, has eliminated librarians, instrumental music instruction and Spanish classes at elementary schools as part of \$10 million in cuts for the current school year. And Quincy Public School District 172 in west central Illinois is considering a four-day school week, among other proposals, in an effort to trim busing and overhead costs, according to Herb Jackson, that board's president.

The long-term costs of such cuts could be great. "When you're losing money," argues former state schools Superintendent Robert Leininger, "you can't possibly provide the kind of education you did before."

And more fiscal difficulties could lie ahead. The federally mandated education reforms under No Child Left Behind require student achievement to start improving next year. The new law will require schools to show annual improvement in reading, math and science until 2014, at which time 100 percent of students should meet or exceed standards. Schools that fail to meet standards could end up losing students and, as a result, federal dollars.

"We're asking districts to do more with less," state Superintendent Schiller says. He's lobbying the feds to let Illinois veer from the timeline.

But the federal government isn't the only concern. School superintendents fear the state will renege on its final two state aid payments this school year as it struggles to close the state's budget gap. While Blagojevich has not said whether he will freeze those payments, former Gov. Jim Edgar used that solution to help solve his budget problems. The stakes are high. Many districts could lose several hundred thousand dollars that were built into their budgets.

For Donald Hahn, superintendent of Olympia Community Unit School District 16 in rural Stanford, southwest of Bloomington, the final two state aid payments would total more than \$300,000, an amount that roughly covers the salaries and benefits of 10

teachers. And the district already faces an almost \$3 million deficit.

"When you take away that promise, it compounds the problems," says Rep. Mitchell. He and other downstate Republicans have introduced a bill to change the state aid payment schedule. Instead of 24 payments, the measure would mandate 22 equal payments to be made before the end of the fiscal year. Currently, those payments total about \$7.2 billion.

Schiller would go further. He proposes increasing the state's guaranteed per pupil spending from \$4,560 to \$4,760 for the fiscal year that begins July 1. The state has not increased this level since fiscal year 2002. But to do so would cost the state \$253 million. Schiller also wants the state to fully fund special education grants. Districts currently are receiving only 91 percent of their intended monies. Full funding would cost the state an additional \$210 million. To cover these additions, the state would need to come up with another \$463 million.

"I don't apologize for it," Schiller said during a legislative committee hearing. "I apologize to the schools and school districts. It's not enough."

While this increase would help struggling districts, Schiller argues it only scratches at what's really needed. In the long-term, he would increase the guaranteed per pupil level even higher, to \$5,665. That's the amount supported by Network 21, a Chicago-based education spending reform group, and by the Education Funding Advisory Board created by the legislature. Advocates say this sum is the minimum needed to educate a public school student. But to increase the foundation level to this higher amount would cost the state an additional \$1.8 billion.

"It costs a helluva lot of money," agrees Leininger, who chairs the funding advisory board.

Everyone agrees, too, fundamental change, including an increase in the level of per pupil spending, would require increases in state revenues.

That would seem radical this spring, but some advocate changing the way schools are funded. "Nobody can criticize the Illinois General Assembly for not putting a lot of money into

education — you have," Leininger told lawmakers. "The problem is you're putting it in the same formula you've been putting it in for years, and it's been broken for years."

Suggestions for overhauling school finance generally call for taking the pressure off local taxpayers. "We can't go any further with property tax," says Scott Goldstein, policy adviser for Network 21. As it stands, local property taxes comprise 52 percent of education funding. The state puts in 38.9 percent, and the federal government provides the rest.

Nationally, Illinois' education funding scheme rates among the worst. In a study by the Education Trust, an education reform advocacy group in Washington, D.C., Illinois ranked 45th out of 47 states studied because it covers such a low percentage of education costs.

The debate over lessening the burden on local taxpayers is not new. During the 1990s, the focus was on a dollar-for-dollar switch from the local property tax to the state income tax. Some of the momentum went out of that debate in 1996, however, when the Illinois Supreme Court determined the state doesn't have to provide 51 percent of all dollars for education, despite state constitutional language giving the state "primary responsibility."

This spring, though, some new ideas are on the table. Sen. Miguel del Valle, a Chicago Democrat and chairman of the Senate Education Committee, is floating one that would provide property taxpayers relief for school levies. Rep. Monique Davis, also a Chicago Democrat, is sponsoring the same proposal in the House.

Under the plan, county clerks would calculate tax bills just as they do now. However, the state would establish a set percentage of property tax relief, which would be sent to the county assessors. They would then lower the actual bill for homeowners. For example, if the state provided 20 percent relief and schools levied \$100 per homeowner, the state would send the county \$20 and the homeowner's bill would total \$80. Del Valle pegs the total cost of the relief at \$3.2 billion, and he calls for a 1 percent increase in the state income

tax to help cover those costs.

But del Valle doesn't stop there. He also would increase the state's guaranteed foundation level to \$5,665 per pupil. And he would make education a continuing appropriation, so it is always funded first.

Del Valle admits the idea might not have legs this year because of state budget woes, but he says he feels obligated to get people talking. "When we had surpluses, people didn't want to talk about it then either," says del Valle. "At what point do we start talking about the most critical issue in public education? I refuse to continue to wait for the right time."

Further, he charges that the prevalence of local school deficit spending "has served us well" by letting the General Assembly avoid tackling the inequities in education funding.

Leininger is skeptical that this year's debate will be any different from the last few years. "We've made the presentations and said the same damn things about school funding. We have an over-reliance on property tax, we need more state funding. We've got to fundamentally change the way we do it."

Changing the way education is funded is certainly the topic du jour, says the state board's Ey. While he, along with Goldstein of Network 21, believe all funding scenarios are on the political bargaining table, lawmakers are steeling themselves against the debate.

Legislators in both chambers acknowledge that the financial problems in Illinois' schools are severe. But any solution requiring increased taxes may be more than they are willing to stomach this year. "You're making the case, it seems to me, for us not to be able to help you," Rep. Constance Howard, a Chicago Democrat, told Schiller.

In the meantime, Carlinville's Collins and Cairo's Isom, along with other school officials, continue to watch their districts' rising red ink and sinking revenues. They watch the debate in Springfield too.

"There's a way to be a hero here," says Collins. "The legislators are going to have to stand up and be counted if we want a quality education program. I'm tired, as a district, of being a political football." □

LEAVING CHILDREN BEHIND

CHILDREN AS PAWNS

The Politics of Educational Reform

Timothy Hacsí, Harvard University Press, 2002

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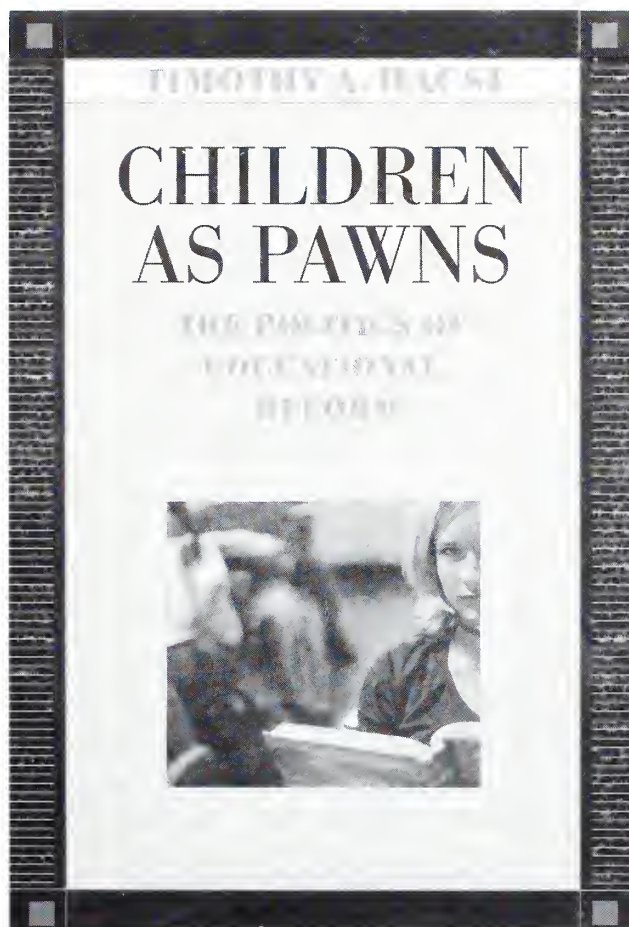
Edited by Larry Cuban and Michael Usdan, Teachers College Press, 2003

Review essay by Maureen Foertsch McKinney

Ah, the allure of education reform. Wearing the “education leader” mantle has helped more than one politician climb to higher office. Politicians want to claim to be catalysts for change. But change driven by ambition may not help children if policy-makers put no resources behind the big ideas.

“What has hurt us here in the United States, is that most of these reform agendas are never sustained,” says Illinois’ schools Superintendent Robert Schiller, who has been involved in reform movements in several states, including Delaware, Louisiana and Michigan. “It usually lasts as long as the governor, the legislator or the state superintendent is in office — and then they start all over again — or until such time as there’s enough pent up resistance to modify the change and we go back to status quo all over again.”

And rarely are these reforms



based on practice or research. “Often times,” Schiller says, “good public policy falls prey to good politics.”

When that happens, children’s interests are no longer the priority argues historian Timothy Hacsí in *Children as Pawns: The Politics of Educational Reform*, which was published last year by Harvard University Press. Schiller agrees. Reforms made in the name of children, he says, often have more to do with adults and their agendas.

Hacsí looked at several reform attempts and weighed research against reality. He found, no surprise, that policy-makers — read politicians — have a tendency to seek out evidence that supports their aims rather than unbiased evaluation that gives a good picture of what works in the classroom. “The heavily political nature of education can be very harmful at times. It certainly clouds the

***Competing forces will
always shape policy-making
in education. Timothy
Hasci's list includes
ideology, fear of raising
taxes, bureaucratic inertia,
class and racial conflict.***

picture when one is trying to determine what works," writes Hasci, who is a research associate in the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

The education issue has remained at the forefront of the nation's agenda, he notes. "Yet we have jumped from one reform to the other, with mixed results at best."

Hasci's book is a plea to those who shape education policy to heed research evidence. His assertion is simple logic: To work from the best, least partisan information available is better than acting on intuition or what is politically popular.

What has been popular of late is to regard schools as businesses. Under this schema, schools are factories that produce teacher performance and student achievement. The corporate world, Schiller says, has been what he calls "the real hammer" behind education reform movements since publication of a national commission's 1983 report *A Nation at Risk*, which was highly critical of the state of American education.

The key to the business strategy is accountability. Put to work in several urban school systems, including Chicago's, accountability was embraced last year by President George W. Bush through his sweeping 1,184-page revision of the 1965 federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act. Under his program, which he dubbed with the catchy phrase, "No Child Left Behind," Bush managed to greatly expand the role of the federal government in public schools.

No Child Left Behind requires annual performance evaluations and gives parents the chance to comparison shop should their children's schools not meet the grade. When a school fails to meet state standards two years running, parents can opt to send their children elsewhere. Under this new law, states are required to test every student in grades three through eight, which is double the number of annual standardized tests that have been required by Illinois.

Last July, Rod Paige, U.S. secretary of education, announced that about 8,600 of the nation's schools had failed to meet their states' academic standards for two consecutive years. That month,

Illinois announced it had 232 of those schools. In Chicago alone, 124,000 students were eligible to exercise the transfer option. But only 7 percent of those who were eligible requested to move.

It seems the costly reform — \$12 million from the feds for tests in Illinois alone — will in fact help few Illinois children. This is no surprise. As with any reform based on choice, the fundamental problem is that it often fails to benefit the children in greatest need. For choice to work, parents must exercise the option. This approach also assumes schools will have the backing they need to improve. Saying schools are bad and announcing this to parents and the press in no way automatically leads to better schools. Conservative pundit George Will eloquently explained why this — what he called shaming power — cannot work: It depends on attentive parents. The reality is, more likely than not, that children in the poorest performing schools come from homes where parents face distractions that make it hard, if not impossible, to focus on educational choices.

And it is unrealistic to assume that the poorest performing schools will — or can — do a better job of educating students just because the government has ordered that it happen.

In other words, this top-down reform leaves out the very children who most need help.

This failure to take into account the social problems plaguing urban schools pokes major holes in business-oriented school reforms, note authors Larry Cuban and Michael Usdan in their recent book, *Powerful Reforms with Shallow Roots: Improving America's Urban Schools*. "In their theories of action and policy talk, reformers largely ignored the history of urban schools and the persistent wrestling with issues of poverty, race, ethnicity and social class," the pair wrote in the 2003 volume published by the Teachers College Press at Columbia University. The duo rejected as simplistic the theories' assumption that "all schools needed the same prescription: the application of business principles to school operations, efficient

top management, alignment of organizational functions and harder work from students, teachers and principals.”

Gains were made in overall scores through the 1995 Chicago school reform program, but not among those schools with the lowest-income students, according to the *Shallow Roots* analysis of changes made after the then-Republican-controlled legislature centralized authority of the system under Mayor Richard Daley.

“The system’s low-performing high schools — about 60 percent of the system — have been found ‘no better’ than before the mayor’s team attempted to improve them through accountability sanctions, including many changes in principals and much teacher turnover in the worse of them,” wrote Dorothy Shipps, the Columbia researcher who analyzed the Chicago reforms.

She also found that the schools on probation were disproportionately in the poorest — and therefore most likely to be African-American — neighborhoods in Chicago. African-American children fared the worst, particularly those in schools with low-income populations of more than 90 percent.

And her analysis found that African-American students who were failing were more than four times as likely to be held back than white students who performed as poorly. At the same time, the progress of Chicago students who were held back a grade — the vast majority coming from low-income schools — didn’t improve to a greater degree than students who were promoted despite poor performance.

The lesson that should be learned by Chicago school reform was succinctly put by the news monthly *Catalyst: Voices of Chicago School Reform*: “[The] main reason for school failure is that principals and teachers have not been supported and trained to meet the needs of low-income children.”

This problem of demanding reforms without providing support plagues financially ailing schools outside Chicago, as well, Schiller says.

One of the requirements of No Child Left Behind is that every classroom will have qualified teachers

rather than those teaching outside their fields of expertise.

“We certainly want to have qualified teachers in every classroom — that’s one of our state laws,” Schiller says. But the state has a shortage of qualified teachers, particularly in math, science and special education.

“Simply ordaining at the federal level that you shall have a qualified teacher in every classroom doesn’t make for closing the gap in the reality that a district can’t afford to pay more than \$24,000 a year, and adjoining districts are starting off at \$36,000,” Schiller says.

“So there are pronouncements and expectations out there in No Child Left Behind that are admirable. But there are the realities that are never even addressed. When they say, ‘We can’t hire any [math teachers], there aren’t any out there,’ what do I say?”

Illinois recently asked for extensions on meeting some of the demands of No Child Left Behind. “That’s the hard part. It’s not the unwillingness. It’s just the capability.

“Aspirationally and directionally, I cannot argue against the intentions of No Child Left Behind,” Schiller says. “No one can argue against it. The problem is that we are currently facing an enormous economic challenge statewide and nationally whereby districts can barely keep their doors open. What we have colliding right now are these high aspirations and requirements with the fiscal realities of districts barely able to meet operating expenses.”

Competing forces will always shape policy-making in education. Hacsí’s list includes ideology, fear of raising taxes, bureaucratic inertia, class and racial conflict. “Sometimes, however, evaluation evidence can come along at the right time and place and play a major role in the shaping of policy.”

No Child Left Behind’s grand vision does seem to be aimed at giving every child a good education. That philosophy is a step in the right direction. Our priorities for education have evolved beyond the post-Sputnik days of demanding an excellent education for our best and brightest while ignoring the neediest. Hacsí calls

this drive to provide all children with a strong education a daunting challenge and a lofty goal.

The challenge is particularly daunting for Illinois at a time when its schools are facing a fiscal crisis, Schiller says. As many as 80 percent of the state’s school districts are projected to be operating at a deficit by the end of the school year. Illinois ranks at the bottom among states in the share it spends on public education.

“We have already had several districts go bankrupt,” Schiller says. “We will see many of them going to the next step of going bankrupt and severely cutting services, cutting back teachers and services and programs.”

This further highlights the gap in funding between the state’s wealthiest and poorest districts. “School finance reform? It’s necessary. We need it, but I don’t think there’s a readiness level at this time,” Schiller says.

“Ultimately, the power is in the hands of the people who can get enough votes to pass the legislation and who have enough money to implement the reforms,” he says. “So he who has the gold has the power; he who has access to the majority votes can shape the agenda.”

Hacsí reminds his readers that politicians can be driven by passion, a desire to do what is right, and not just a desire to gain power.

“No one would think of running for president or governor now without laying claim to being an education leader,” Hacsí says. “But there are many things that are certain in politics, especially that talk is cheap.”

This is a golden opportunity for lawmakers in Illinois to earn the right to be called education leaders. Listening to the research-backed calls for school funding reform would be bold and brave. And increasing spending on education would be the right thing to do.

Without some fix, federal requirements for accountability become irrelevant. Schiller says, “As more and more schools tumble, what good is it? What good is the choice?” □

Carrot and stick

The White House wants to lure states to a new Medicaid plan. The states worry they'll get whacked

by Aaron Chambers
Illustration by Kathleen Riley

States call President George W. Bush's Medicaid plan the carrot-and-stick approach to state-federal relations. They could take the carrot, but they dread a swift whack from the stick.

The White House envisions tidy administration of health care for the poor. If states get their programs in order, the administration contends, then there's no whack to fear.

One thing is clear: If Bush has his way, states would have the burden of keeping booming Medicaid costs under control. If they can't do that, covering the extra costs would be their burden, too.

States do have other concerns about the president's proposed federal budget for fiscal year 2004, which begins in October. They complain, for instance, that it wouldn't sufficiently fund federal mandates for education, for special education in particular, and that it lacks adequate support for state and local homeland security efforts. But Bush's dramatic Medicaid proposal clearly is of greatest concern to Illinois and other states.

Bush would transform what amounts to open-ended entitlements into capped allotments. The federal government no longer would reimburse states for a percentage of their Medicaid spending — an arrangement that's limited only by what states can afford to spend up front. Instead, the feds would give states a set sum of money each year, and states would cover any additional program spending.

States are cool to this fiscal risk. But most are in a budgetary bind, and the White House is dangling an opportunity

to wriggle free in the short term.

Illinois and other states are struggling with budget deficits not seen since World War II. In this state, Gov. Rod Blagojevich estimates the budget gap for this fiscal year and the one that begins in July at \$4.8 billion. The recent recession and economic fallout following the September 11 terrorist attacks fueled this red ink. But so has Medicaid, one of the greatest pressures on state spending.

The program in Illinois, which serves 1.6 million poor people, cost \$4.7 billion in state dollars in the fiscal year that ended last June, according to the Department of Public Aid, which administers the program. That figure does not include administrative costs. Andrew Kane, the department's deputy administrator for medical programs, says spending has grown by about 8 percent each year over the last decade.

Increased spending is driven largely by the growing cost of prescription drugs, innovative drugs in particular. This state also has expanded its program in recent years to cover such groups as pregnant women and children. Another program increased eligibility for poor people who are 65 years of age or older, blind or disabled.

This is where the carrot comes in. The president's plan would give \$3.25 billion to states that opt into the program — on top of their annual allotments. States could choose to continue operating under the current system, and the feds would simply continue reimbursing them for its share of Medicaid costs. But states that opt out would not share the extra aid.

The White House evidently is betting

that the prospect of soothing Medicaid spending strains will coax states on board. Over the first seven years of this 10-year plan, that pot would total \$12.7 billion.

Now for the stick. Over the 10 years, the plan would be "budget neutral." So while federal funding to states that opt in would be \$12.7 billion over allotments in the first seven years, funding in the last three years would be \$12.7 billion under those allotments. The reduction would neutralize the federal government's additional expense from the first seven years.

The Bush Administration's Dennis Smith says the key to making this equation work is more efficient programming on the part of the states. He says such states as Florida, Michigan, New Jersey and Washington have saved money by emphasizing "home-based" and "recipient-oriented" care. These programs discourage recipients from living in institutions, and encourage them to design their own programs within personalized budgets.

Smith, director of the Center for Medicaid and State Operations at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, says if other states follow these models, they, too, will save money and be better positioned to absorb the \$12.7 billion hit in the final three years. "What we're saying to the states is if you adopt these new ways of delivering services today, you will be saving dollars in the long term," he says. "So, when you get to years eight, nine and 10 you won't feel the lower growth rate in federal spending."

He also says states should keep the loss



during fiscal years 2011, 2012 and 2013 in perspective. During those years under the current funding scheme, he says, the federal government's outlays for Medicaid are projected to be \$313.2 billion, \$338.5 billion and \$365.4 billion, respectively. "There's a trillion dollars in those last three years," he says. "So \$12.7 billion out of a trillion is not much money." The Bush proposal would reduce those figures slightly to an estimated \$313 billion, \$334.1 billion and \$357 billion, respectively.

State officials in Illinois and elsewhere are loath to predict to what extent Medicaid spending will grow over the next decade. Some presume, however, that prescription drug costs will continue to stretch their bottom lines. Another factor on the horizon: the Baby Boom generation could, around 2010, severely heighten demand for services.

"One thing is for sure, [states] are a loser in the end," says Michael Bird, chief Capitol Hill lobbyist for the National Conference of State Legislatures. "What this looks like is a loan up front and payback in the end."

Blagojevich does not support the president's Medicaid plan. But he won't speculate on whether Illinois would opt out. Blagojevich's budget proposal for the next fiscal year, which he is scheduled to deliver on the 9th of this month, is expected to assume the Medicaid spending scheme will

remain the same.

In the meantime, his administration is examining ways to curb Medicaid costs. It is investigating how to use the state's prescription drug "purchasing power" to negotiate a better deal with drug companies in an effort to save the state money.

At the same time, the state's largest health insurance lobbying group, the Illinois Association of Health Plans, is pushing the administration to consider privatizing almost half of its Medicaid program. The group argues the state could save \$1 billion over five years. Blagojevich Budget Director John Filan says he can't judge whether the administration would consider such a move because there's no specific proposal.

The governor also has called on Congress to improve the state's current reimbursement rate from 50 cents on the dollar to 55 cents. The rate is calculated under a formula based on per capita income relative to the national average per capita income. The state public aid department estimates the change would mean an extra \$440 million in federal funds for Illinois each year.

Though the 50 percent rate is the minimum states may be reimbursed, other states oppose Illinois' effort unless they too can get more money. "I think it is wishful thinking to believe that Illinois can increase its percentage of reimbursement from the federal government," says

U.S. Sen. Dick Durbin, a Springfield Democrat. "That is not likely to happen."

No surprise, the White House's long-term approach does not sit well with the states. Filan says it's irresponsible to construct a spending plan contingent on the fiscal climate 10 years down the road. "For anybody to say with any kind of confidence that they can look out eight to 10 years and say this is what the world will look like is spending much too much time in Washington and no time in reality," he says. "I really take offense at the lack of sensitivity and understanding of that kind of statement from anybody."

The debate is so heated, in fact, that even the terms used to describe the federal government's commitment to Medicaid under the Bush plan are controversial. State officials say the federal commitment would amount to "block grants," but Bush administration officials object to that term because, they say, it's associated with reduced commitment on the part of the federal government. The feds prefer the term "lump-sum allotments" because, they say, the proposal actually would increase federal funds to the states.

The Bush plan would consolidate two federal funding streams, Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program, the program for children whose families have incomes too high to qualify for Medicaid but too low to afford private insurance. The federal govern-

ment would give each state two blocks of money, one for acute care and one for long-term care. States could transfer 10 percent of funding between each of the grants.

A state's allotment would be increased each year under an inflationary rate that has not been determined. The first allotment, in fiscal year 2004, would be based on the state's expenditures in fiscal year 2002 and adjusted for two years of inflation, according to the Center for Medicaid and State Operations.

The center's Smith says the Bush Administration understands states are facing tough fiscal times, and it's trying to help with an infusion of federal dollars above what they would get under current law. He says the idea is to preserve and protect eligibility gains in state programs that could be in jeopardy because

of the budget crises.

"We recognize that the states are having difficulty putting up their share of the funds," he says. "So this proposal is a way of stabilizing the state budgets while still giving them access to a growing federal fund."

This yet-to-be-determined inflationary rate is key to the debate and could determine whether states ultimately sign on to the president's plan. Kane, of the state public aid department, says, "If they come through and say we'll grow that piece at 20 percent a year, we'll say, 'We'll take it.'" He acknowledges, though, that such a high rate is unlikely.

States also would have to increase their commitment to Medicaid under the plan. But the rate at which state spending on Medicaid must rise has not been determined. The Bush Administra-

tion says this rate would be lower than the one for federal allotments.

The White House is marketing its proposal as an opportunity for states to increase flexibility, design innovative programs and coordinate service delivery with the private sector. But Illinois officials wonder how much flexibility is available in a program devoted to low-income people.

"Can we discontinue some programs? I don't know how you can do that when you're trying to provide health care to the poorest of the poor," says state Rep. Gary Hannig, a Litchfield Democrat and chief budget negotiator for the House Democrats. "It seems like those are the people that don't have health care and those are the ones that the state needs to try and address."

Should this state opt in, and find itself unable to expand Medicaid coverage in the face of restricted funds, Kane says it would be difficult to quantify how service would be affected. "It would be along the lines of you wouldn't see the expansions anymore. It's not like we would suddenly rip the rug out from underneath anybody. It would be more a question of limited options and the state having to cover any growth," he says.

State politics also would determine how Medicaid dollars would be distributed. And that's a concern for Patrick Lenihan, Chicago, where he is deputy commissioner for policy and planning at the city Department of Public Health, is home to roughly half the state's Medicaid caseload. What's more, several city hospitals that serve a disproportionate share of the state's poor depend on a higher rate of funding, which is mandated by federal law. Lenihan fears this mandate would not exist under Bush's plan and predicts there would be political pressure to direct the money elsewhere. "What you end up with is, in essence, a political fight between the advocates for various constituency groups or various beneficiaries," he says. "It pits the elderly against the low-income pregnant women and children."

For now, states are waiting for the next move in Washington, D.C. Specifically, they're on hold for the all-important rate at which federal allotments would increase. Until then, Kane says, "We're not tempted." □

The White House tax plan would cost the states

President George W. Bush promises to stimulate the national economy by eliminating the federal tax on most dividends, but states fear adverse consequences. Should Congress adopt the centerpiece of the president's tax cut package, states foresee lost income tax revenue and higher costs in issuing bonds.

Illinois and other states ask individual income taxpayers to include dividends in their total income for purposes of figuring state income tax. And taxpayers rely on the federal government to issue a 1099 form accounting for those dividends. If the feds cease recording dividends and sending forms, state officials say some taxpayers will claim less income.

That means less income for the states to tax.

"I think the average taxpayer that does his own taxes, if he doesn't get a 1099, he's not going to remember that and not report it," says Edward Boss Jr., chief economist at the Illinois Economic and Fiscal Commission, the General Assembly's accounting arm. "And I don't know how the state would find out he didn't."

Boss estimates the potential annual loss for Illinois at \$200 million.

It's not clear how states could rectify the loss. But state officials examining the tax cut proposal suggest legislatures would need to enact a complex formula to require state taxpayers to report tax-exempt dividends.

Eliminating the tax on dividends also could make state and municipal bonds less attractive to investors. Interest earned on these bonds is not taxed, and that helps lure investors. But if interest earned on stocks also isn't taxed, then there's less incentive to buy government bonds.

"Clearly the proposal would result in a shift to corporate equity and away from tax-exempt municipal securities," says Frank Shafroth, director of state and federal relations at the National Governors Association.

States and municipalities would need to pay higher interest rates on their bonds to make them more attractive. That costs additional money.

Government bonds could still retain some edge over stocks because they're widely regarded as a stable investment. "The advantage that tax-exempt bonds still have, at least those issued by state governments, is they're far more secure than equity investments," says Illinois Budget Director John Filan. "But [eliminating the dividend tax] definitely takes away one of the significant reasons that people look to tax exempt."

Aaron Chambers

DIGGING DIRT

LARDING THE LEAN EARTH

Soil and Society in Nineteenth-Century America

Steven Stoll, Hill and Wang, 2002

Review essay by Robert Kuhn McGregor

Photograph by Jason Lindsey



For the past several weeks I've been telling friends and family that I intended to write about dirt. They nodded sagely. "Illinois politics," they sighed. "It's a fertile field." No, I responded, I have things I want to say about dirt. Their expressions would turn to horror. Dirt? Surely *Illinois Issues* has better material to print than mere gossip.

Frustrating though they are, such conversations confirm my own suspicions. Soil — tilth, earth, mud, muck, ground, whatever it's called — is a subject most folks treat like the dirt beneath their feet.

At least this is the proper time of year to consider such issues. Walk across the

good earth just about anywhere around here, and the muck will weigh down thoughts as much as shoes. Too soon the tractors will be out, tearing new furrows, pumping canned fertility into the ground. Then will come the notices buried in the back pages of environmentally responsible newspapers: atrazine and nitrate levels abnormally high in local lakes, nursing mothers should move out of state. There will be a discussion on expenses posed by erosion, followed by one on dangerous chemical compositions in fish.

Ah, a muddy morn in spring.

Sticky though they are, the day-to-day environmental concerns of agriculture are far too confined a field

for anyone wishing to consider the matter of dirt. Viewed from the proper angle, the point where the furrow meets the blade becomes the essential meeting place of nature and humankind. While it's an obvious falsehood that people control nature, or will ever hope to, we do exercise profound management, making black soils produce corn and soybeans where once they anchored prairie grasses. Farmers are humanity's most basic representatives to the planet. And, too often, analysts and scholars have given them a tough row.

The 10,000-year history of agriculture is endlessly fascinating, but let us confine ourselves to the briefest moment: farming in America. How

have society's representatives got themselves to huge economies of scale, obscene dependence on sharp-tongued chemical salesmen and ever-declining income? Like just about everything else in history, no one planned this state of affairs, yet it was an almost inevitable product of the past.

Set the wayback machine for the 17th century, the beginnings of American agriculture. Doughty pioneers, doing their best to ignore the advice freely offered by Native Americans, experiment feverishly, scratching the soil, trying to determine what will thrive in a climate maddeningly different from old Europe. Everywhere, the limits and the potential of America provide the stage: land available beyond the wildest imaginings; too few hands to work the soil. In the three centuries to follow, this fundamental attribute — much land, little labor — shaped our agricultural development.

What emerged initially was, to all appearances, profligate waste — untidy tracts full of stumps and trash, abandoned fields given over to scrub forest. In truth, the system was a sound ecological compromise that allowed farmers to exploit their soils with the hands available. Rather than wasting precious labor on restoring soil fertility through manuring, farmers left that work to nature, continually abandoning old fields to open new ones, returning to the original fields in a generation or two. Economies of scale kept them ahead of their creditors.

Of course, the self-appointed ag experts of old Europe, who could see neither the value nor the profit in such a seemingly haphazard approach, shamed the American farmer into undertaking "progressive" reforms. Clean up those fields. Straighten those rows. Deepen those furrows. Spread that manure.

Our troubles began right there.

Beneath the emphasis on cleaner fields, superior crops and better techniques lay one simple assumption, one simple measure of success. As soil historian Steven Stoll points out in *Larding the Lean Earth*, a progressive farm was one that produced ever-larger harvests. Here was a concept so

elementary and so attractive that any and all American farmers were fully prepared to embrace the implications. By whatever means the situation dictated, the most modern, most scientific, most progressive farmer would be the one who achieved the greatest yields — at whatever cost to the environment, or to himself.

The problem with the newfangled "scientific" approach to agriculture was its wholly unrealistic expectations, given American conditions. Cutting straighter, deeper furrows, removing the trash, was going to create severe erosion problems, unless folks could carry on a labor-intensive operation. Using barnyard manure to restore fertility was even more back-breaking.

So Americans up and down the East Coast fashioned model farms that quickly gave up the ghost. The topsoil washed away and fertility vanished. Far easier in this atmosphere to move on, take up new lands in the West, than to attempt the demanding measures necessary to restore old, worn-out lands.

Bad advice from scientists played an important role in destroying the ecological balance of many good American farms, especially in the South. The harvest was a mentality of migration and waste. Seeking new lands, farm folk moved across the Appalachians, across the Old Northwest, into Illinois, and onward across the Plains. Lost fertility, the consequence of those deep furrows, was replaced by new lands to the west.

The scientists followed in the wake of this migration, wringing their hands. Abandonment would have to end sooner or later, they figured rightly. What they did not calculate so accurately was that in time, habits of mind would become fixed in the collective consciousness of most American farmers.

Agricultural experts continued to hammer away at the idea that science could replenish nature's lamentable deficiencies. The dirt has gone bad? Add some marl (ancient seashells gone to lime) to reduce acidity. Add some Peruvian bat guano to restore nitrogen. All the while, chemists peered into their beakers and test tubes, searching for newer, more efficient, less labor-

demanding artificial stimulants for soil health.

When Americans finally did run out of open land to squander (some time around 1890, according to the federal census), science was ready. Farmers could continue to plow deep, concentrate on monocrops, produce ever-larger yields, not worry about the cumulative effects on the earth. Science stood ready to provide artificial resuscitation.

There were prices to pay, to be sure. In the 1890s, and again in the 1930s, drought dried out Plains soils loosened by the plow, separated from the deep roots of native grasses. Then the wind lifted the dirt in great sheets, carrying it to the Atlantic Ocean.

But this could be fixed, too. Plow with the contour, add a few wind break pines. And chemicals, always chemicals. Herbicides. Insecticides. Fertilizers. If most Americans believe, as farmers lament, that milk comes from a store, it is also true that too many farmers believe soil fertility comes out of a tank hauled behind a tractor.

The logic set in motion by the myriad advocates of progressive agriculture before the Civil War was readily accepted by new and powerful forces following the Second World War. Despite some broad hints to the contrary — the agricultural depression of the Roaring Twenties, the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl of the Thirties — the federal government in the Fifties readily adopted the fundamental assumptions of an earlier age: Greater yields make better farmers.

There has been a Kafka-like quality to government advice: We will pay you not to plant (so as to reduce output and raise prices), but we will help you to grow three times as much on the acreage you do plant. If this makes sense, please don't tell me.

The government has been helpful, in so many ways. Farmers wanted tougher, square-shaped tomatoes — more profitable to ship. The government supported hybridization programs that did indeed produce tougher, squarer tomatoes. Not better tasting ones, surely, but we do get what we aim at.

More than anything, we (the

government, I mean) have aimed at creating the perfect environment for producing those burgeoning harvests. Used to be the ag service recommended arsenic to kill pests; there is still plenty of the residue lying in Illinois lakebeds. Then came the chemical hydrocarbons, DDT and such. Often against the misgivings of farmers themselves, farm agents rammed these chemicals down everyone's throats, only to reverse course when Rachel Carson pointed out that DDT killed eagles and robins, caused a variety of cancers and did a poor job of eliminating insects.

DDT was banned for use in the United States, but the mentality that promoted its benefits in the first place sustains itself. Newer, "safer" chemicals take the place of the old, raining down while rivers turn odd colors, nesting falcons disappear and pregnant women make a run for it — whatever chemical it takes to produce more, even as farm

prices drop through the floor.

Farmers are rightly regarded as conservative and suspicious types, resistant to change. Given the welter of conflicting advice they have absorbed over the past half century, who can blame them?

Once upon a time, there was real ecology in the practice of farming. The goal was to establish a sustainable enterprise, one that could support a family over the long haul. The land had to produce, but the farmer had to take steps to ensure the health of the land as well — a wise bargain negotiated between humanity and nature at their most frequent meeting place, the furrow.

But the progressive types had other plans. In the name of rational science, they sought to destroy — systematically — that older, ecological bargain. In its place came the worship of the ever-larger harvest, gotten by whatever

means cheaply available. Squander the land, squander the energy required to produce the chemicals, squander whatever water and earth is necessary to sponge up the excess, but always, always produce more corn, more soybeans.

The soil beneath our feet is a living entity, an organic system comprised of countless life forms building up nutrients, breaking them down, fixing them in the dirt. Modern science too much ignores this life, giving over to quick fixes, working hard to create an artificial heaven to last the maize a season or two. We measure the cost only with a ledger: Did we get more harvest this year?

Small wonder we think of dirt the way we do. □

Robert Kuhn McGregor, an environmental historian at the University of Illinois at Springfield, is a regular contributor to the magazine.

Profile

Growing change

Some Illinois farmers are finding ways to save their land, their livelihoods and their communities

by Alan Mamoser

Allen Williams is a pioneer. He's among a relative handful of Illinois farmers who are finding innovative ways to challenge conventional agriculture.

Williams, who operates several farms near Cerro Gordo just east of Decatur, is an advocate of what has come to be called "sustainable" agriculture. This means that for him and other like-minded farmers agriculture's long-term impact on the land is its most important measure of success.

For this reason, these farmers pay attention to the subtle interrelationships of soil, plants and insects, experiment with a greater diversity of crops in more complex rotations, and put considerable effort into conserving black earth. They avoid genetically modified seed and dependence on chemical fertilizers and weedkillers.

In short, they think of the farm in the natural ecosystem. And they believe these innovative practices will sustain

their land, their livelihoods and their rural communities.

While this perspective has yet to send deep roots into Illinois, it does show life. The Illinois Sustainable Ag Society, for example, estimates that between 1,500 and 2,500 of this state's farmers and livestock producers are following some sustainable practices, depending on how the term is defined. The farmer-based group is one of many representing diverse interests within sustainable agriculture.



Some Illinois farmers have been testing and blending farming methods for years. Williams, for instance, operates conventional as well as organic farms. Still, his methods might seem radical in this traditional corn-and-bean state. Williams plants a diverse mixture of crops across the year, including white corn, soybeans and occasional winter wheat, which he double-crops with sunflowers. He intermixes his main crops with companions, planting buckwheat in the corn rows to attract beneficial insects and ward off pests. And he plants cover crops to hold and nourish the soil in off-seasons.

"I cannot say at what point in time my farming is 'sustainable,'" he says. "I can't say, 'this year I'm more sustainable or this year I'm less.' It's always a goal of trying to conserve and improve the land, and to do this while making a living."

In the early 1990s, Williams dedicated some of his land to organic crops. Since then, he's watched the market for organic products grow. Encouraged, he added more acres. Today, several of his farms are certified as organic.

Williams arrived gradually at a crop mix for his organic farms, always adjusting to suit the market. He began with a four-crop rotation of blue corn

or popcorn, then soybeans, then grains of different types, followed by a fallow year. Later, he realized he needed a better return on the organics and went to fallow after a two-crop rotation. Every seventh year an organic field is left fallow or planted in cover crop. Recently, he stopped using genetically modified soybeans on his conventional fields in order to protect the integrity of the organic fields.

Williams has long struggled to conserve the soil on his organic and conventional acreage. Gradually, he reduced tillage to almost nothing, planted wind breaks and grass border strips between fields and along waterways, and began to terrace his fields along the land contours. Always looking for new systems and approaches, he decided to try removing pesticides and synthetic fertilizers altogether.

Through years of experimentation, innovative farmers have gained insight into the natural systems on their land. Yet most believe their dialogue with nature is far easier than their struggle with the market, whose infrastructure is dominated by the big commodity crops.

Just finding outlets for a changing mix of crops presents considerable difficulty. Williams had to haul one

crop of organic canola 200 miles to get it processed. As for his popcorn, he had to create his own label and sell directly to organic food brokers. To seek out new markets for his array of products, he worked closely with a local elevator, the Clarkson Grain Co. in Cerro Gordo. Clarkson, as it happens, is now the largest U.S. domestic supplier of organic grains.

Yet, despite their struggles, Williams and other innovative farmers — like most pioneers — may be better suited to the future than others who stick to conventional ways.

If Illinois farmers are to endure, or grow in number, they will need to gain more prowess in marketing many new crops, according to Mike Rahe of the state Department of Agriculture. "Farmers cannot continue to rely on the corn-soybean rotation and survive, especially now with rising international competition in these staples. We'll need to seek alternatives and become more diverse in our growing," says Rahe, who monitors land and water resources for the agency.

For the moment, that's decidedly not the direction of Illinois agriculture. The momentum has been toward fewer crops grown on bigger farms. Beyond the concerns this raises about economic

and environmental impacts, there seems little doubt about effects on the state's social ecosystem. Fewer young people are staying on farms, and rural communities are becoming less viable. Advocates of sustainable agriculture worry about the loss of local independence. Growers, they argue, are caught up in far-flung markets that draw resources from home.

"A lot of cash flows out of communities, and the towns lose a locally based economic system," says Rahe. "There needs to be more opportunities for growers that are not based upon size or scale."

This is the heart of the matter. Ultimately, soil conservation, pesticide reduction, crop diversity and other strategies of sustainable agriculture are undertaken to address one central concern: the future of Illinois' rural communities.

This might seem a daunting challenge. But a few innovators are turning again to the land as a place to begin, making the highest commitment to understanding the farm as a whole system, then trying to open new markets for the products they generate. They are creating a counter-trend of sorts, admittedly small, but one that is nevertheless emerging in communities throughout the state.

Among their number are small-scale producers who are moving into food-grade quality crops, finding markets here and overseas for edible soybeans, buckwheat, white corn and blue corn. Many are trying pasture-raised poultry, vegetables, grapes. Some are turning to fiber crops for energy generation, medicinal crops, including Ginseng, and aquaculture, including shrimp cultivation. One southern Illinois farmer in Golconda, who is raising fresh water prawn using a chemical-free recycling system, hosts an annual festival.

And that is one unexpected byproduct. Innovative farmers also are creating new communities. They are learning to promote new products by celebrating the growing seasons. They are finding opportunities for agri-tourism, opening their land for mushroom hunting and summer camps for kids.

Others are entering urban markets directly and creating communities around their products. These farmers are helping to grow the best guarantee of long-term market viability: They are finding loyal customers for life.

This suggests ways in which sustainable agriculture might emerge on a large scale. It would begin with the farmer who nurtures the biotic community of the land, then extend to everyone involved in the chain of food production and consumption. If marketers, grocers and consumers take greater responsibility for the origin and quality of the food they consume, they might well share a sense of ownership in local farms and farm communities.

Allen Williams' farming practices require extra effort, certainly, and intense care for the land and careful management. Even he acknowledges that the short-term gain is not always apparent. "Many farmers are not doing this because the near-term cost is high," he says. "But the long-term gain will pay off over years, many years, looking at two and three generations out."

It is two and three generations out, and the thought about what life will be like on the land in this state, that is motivating many farmers to experiment, improve techniques and develop new methods that will improve the land and support the communities that live off that land.

No new orthodoxy has arisen to counter the dominant conventional agriculture in Illinois today. There is only the belief on the part of some that the land, cared for in the long term, will allow the long chain of agriculture to thrive, from rural communities to urban consumers. This is stewardship based on the highest principle, a close human relationship to the land. In essence, sustainable agriculture means handing the next generation something better than what we received. □

Alan Mamoser is a regional planner in Chicago. His most recent piece for Illinois Issues, "Island Grove afternoon," appeared in November 2001.

Producers meet consumers at a Chicago farm market

At the heart of sustainable agriculture is concern for community. The farm market in the Austin neighborhood on Chicago's West Side brings the concept to life. Since 1998, city residents have been buying directly from those who work the land.

LaDonna Redmond, a community activist in Austin, got the idea because her young son suffered from food allergies and she wanted him to have the freshest and best food possible. After learning about organic foods untreated by pesticides, she got in touch with a high school friend who had bought a farm in Pembroke Township in Kankakee County, south of Chicago. Through him, she encountered a community of African-American farmers who are dedicated to organic farming. She worked with them to establish the farm market for the Austin community.

Some 12 families from the Pembroke Farmer's Cooperative provide produce for the Austin market. About six vendors arrive for the Saturday market. What they bring is seasonal and tasty fruits and vegetables, including a wide range of greens, peas and beans. A fruit grower from Michigan also makes the trip to Austin.

Some of the best customers are the neighborhood's many senior citizens, who begin arriving at market opening at 7 a.m. and provide a steady stream for two hours. About 4,500 customers each season make the market pretty hectic for the first few hours.

Redmond prefers the term "sustainable" to "organic" because it encompasses concern for the whole community. In fact, she fears the "organic" label will become too trendy and lead people to miss the point. "We're trying to say something greater than just organic. It's not about corporate farms with 3,000 acres in organic peas. We want to support small family farms."

Redmond loves the tomatoes, the turnip greens and the mustard greens. "These foods are important in African-American tradition, and it's good to see them getting produced by local farmers, organically." The market is open for business every Saturday, June through October, from 7 a.m. to noon, on the Emmett School playlot at Madison and Central in Chicago.

Alan Mamoser

C ONVICTIONS

A federal court is scheduled to sentence **Scott Fawell**, a top aide to former Gov. George Ryan. A jury found Fawell and Ryan's campaign committee guilty on all counts of corruption charges stemming from the eight years Ryan spent as secretary of state.

Fawell, the highest-ranking official charged as part of the federal government's Operation Safe Road probe, was Ryan's chief of staff in the secretary of state's office and Ryan's 1998 gubernatorial campaign manager.

The jury convicted Fawell and the campaign fund of racketeering, mail fraud and obstruction of justice. Fawell also was convicted of tax evasion, perjury and theft of state property.

Fawell is scheduled to be sentenced in June.

A PPOINTMENTS

Ernesto Velasco stepped down from the top post at the Illinois Department of Corrections amid questions about his response to allegations of guard brutality at the Cook County Jail during his tenure as executive director there. Velasco had been the first Latino to head the state's corrections system.

Joel Brunsvold, a Democratic state representative from Milan, has been named director of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources. The Quad Cities-area lawmaker served on the House Environment and Energy Committee.

Charles Johnson, a Frankfort resident, was named director of the Department on Aging. He had been executive director of the Northeastern Illinois Area Agency on Aging.

Roy Dolgos, a Vietnam veteran from Chicago, was tapped to direct the state's Department of Veterans' Affairs. He was overseeing finance and operations at the Inter Parking Corp.

GETTING THE WORD OUT

The gov's media team is in place

Gov. Rod Blagojevich's administration has made an effort in recent weeks to work the kinks out of its media relations. But the real test lies ahead.

The Democrat is scheduled on the 9th to unveil his state budget proposal for fiscal year 2004. That proposal, which must reconcile a projected \$3.6 billion deficit, will inevitably disappoint some. And this will transform what's largely been an unchallenged administration monologue into a critical dialogue.

On that point, Blagojevich Communications Director **Cheryle Jackson** downplays concern. "It's going to be tough," she says. But, she adds, "It's not going to be tougher than what we've done to date."

Jackson has experience shaping a message and dealing with media demands. Before joining the governor's staff, she served as director of national-state relations for Amtrak. "God forbid, when there was a train derailment and it was a national news story, I'd be surrounded by 200 reporters, all asking questions," she says. "And the reporters are political reporters, general assignment reporters and transportation reporters, coming at the story from three different angles."

Before that, Jackson served as vice president for communications at National Public Radio. Kevin Klose, NPR's president and chief executive officer, says her work helped increase the network's listenership by 50 percent in the last few years. "There are very many corporate communications issues to get our story out right and make sure that people understand who we are because we are a nonprofit public service radio system," he says. "She brought to it tremendous creativity, energy, thoughtfulness and unfailing poise in dealing with many of the issues that we faced."

But Blagojevich has yet to take the lead in decisions that could slash state services or jobs, or increase taxes or fees — decisions many Capitol players anticipate will be part of Blagojevich's efforts to shore up the budget.

Expect a public relations battle.

To help with that, Blagojevich hired **Tom Schafer**, a respected longtime spokesman for the state Department of Public Health, to serve as Springfield press secretary. He also hired **Abby Ottenhoff**, who was an aide to House Speaker Michael Madigan, to serve as Chicago press secretary.

The administration lost Deputy Gov. **Doug Scofield** early last month, however, and it's not clear whether Blagojevich's message will suffer as a result. The former chief of staff to U.S. Rep. Luis Gutierrez, a Chicago Democrat, served as communications director during the governor's campaign. In the first months of the administration, he directed policy and communications. He said he was resigning because he wanted more time with his wife and two young children.

Scofield's replacement is Brooklyn native **Bradley Tusk**, formerly a top aide to New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg and a graduate of the University of Chicago Law School.

How well this team does in the next months will be critical to the new governor. A clean, consistent message is good for the media, the public and, ultimately, the chief executive. So says Thom Serafin, whose Chicago-based public relations firm specializes in representing magnets for negative publicity such as Philip Morris and horse racing mogul Dick Duchossois.

His advice for those handling public relations in a crisis situation: Present the principal as an individual, so others can see how that person ticks, and disseminate information in a transparent fashion. "I've been saying this for six months, and people think I'm nuts, but spin is dead and reality is in," Serafin says. "People want to know the reality of what it is. They can deal with good information and bad information. Just give it to them."

Aaron Chambers

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U of I professor wins award

Carl Woese, professor of microbiology and the Stanley O. Ikenberry Endowed Chair at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, has won the Crafoord Prize in Biosciences given by the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, which also selects the Nobel Prizes.

The Crafoord Prize is awarded annually to mark accomplishments in such scientific fields as mathematics, astronomy, geological sciences and biosciences, which are not recognized for the Nobel. The prize money comes from Holger Crafoord, who invented the artificial kidney. The king of Sweden will present the \$500,000 prize to Woese in Stockholm on September 24.

Woese was chosen this year for "his discovery of a third domain of life," the academy said.

In 1977, Woese, in collaboration with U of I microbiologist **Ralph Wolfe**, overturned one of the major beliefs of biology: that all life on Earth belonged to one of two primary lineages, the eukaryotes (animals, plants, fungi and certain unicellular organisms such as paramecia) and the prokaryotes (all other microscopic organisms). Woese and Wolfe showed that there are three primary lineages. The new group of organisms, the archaea, is very simple in its genetic makeup and tends to exist in extreme environments, niches devoid of oxygen and whose temperatures can be near or above the normal boiling point of water.

"What our work did, for the first time, was to put a phylogenetic framework under bacteriology," says Woese. "Without an evolutionary/phylogenetic framework, it is impossible to have a true discipline of bacterial ecology."

Because of Woese's work, scientists now recognize three primary divisions of living systems, called eukaryotes, archaea and bacteria. The method Woese used to identify this third form of life, which involved comparing the sequences of a particular molecule central to cellular function, called ribosomal RNA, has become the standard approach used to identify and classify all microorganisms.

"The living world will no longer be seen as completely distinct from the nonliving world," says Woese. "Nature generates complex patterns, and biological systems are just one example, probably the most interesting ones."

With the study of archaea still in its infancy, Woese says the future is going "to bring forth something most beautiful, most profound, a whole new and deeper understanding of biology," just not in the old molecular terms.



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In defense of "Pate"

As subscribers and natives of Illinois, my wife and I decided to keep up our subscription to *Illinois Issues* when we retired to Florida. I wanted to respond to the brief article on page 36 of the January issue concerning the retirement of Senate President James "Pate" Philip.

More than four paragraphs should have been devoted to this gentleman's distinguished 35-year-plus career serving the people of Illinois in the state House and Senate. He is largely responsible for the \$5 billion surplus that Gov. George Ryan so frivolously frittered away.

If the good people of Illinois think their plight will be better under the new governor, please remember Democrat-controlled legislatures and governors in Illinois have only spent more money and raised state taxes, and two of those governors went to jail.

*Roger Coverley
Lake Mary, Fla.*



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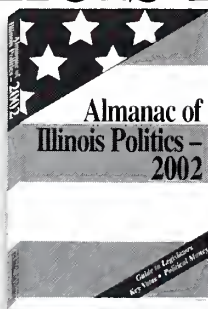
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Madeleine Doubek



While the political puzzle on O'Hare expansion is coming together, the economics have been scrambled

by Madeleine Doubek

O'Hare International Airport expansion keeps eluding Chicago Mayor Richard Daley. Every time it seems he's cemented into place a few pieces of the puzzle, others fall away.

There is hope, though. The November election gave Daley a way around opposition from U.S. Sen. Peter Fitzgerald, the Inverness Republican who has made it his mission to stop federal legislation to seal Daley's agreement with former Republican Gov. George Ryan. Democrats won control of the Illinois House, Senate and governor's office for the first time in 26 years, giving the Democratic mayor-for-life a new venue for his efforts to reconfigure and add runways at the state's premier airport.

In fact, it took Democratic Gov. Rod Blagojevich not much more than a month into his four-year term to announce he would willingly relinquish veto power over new runways. "I'd make an exception for the greater good in terms of moving that forward," the governor told reporters. "That's \$18 billion to \$20 billion for the state economy, 195,000 new jobs." Still, state legislators likely would need to agree, and nullify the law that gives the governor authority to halt airport changes.

Daley had hoped to secure congressional approval to shift seven intersecting runways to six parallel and two diagonal ones. Daley believed that would make undoing those plans next to impossible. But Fitzgerald has blocked the mayor's efforts by threatening a filibuster.

The mayor had spent years fighting, not just with Fitzgerald, but with such suburban Republicans as former state Senate President James "Pate" Philip of Wood Dale and U.S. Rep. Henry Hyde of Wood Dale, who have sided with a vocal suburban minority that has fought O'Hare expansion and supported a new airport at far south suburban Peotone.

But suddenly things appear to be falling into place. The DuPage County Board surprised many by ending its long opposition. Chairman Robert Schillerstrom of Naperville orchestrated that move. "We must develop a new approach, a new dynamic that best serves the people of DuPage County," Schillerstrom announced in January. "What is good for the region is good for DuPage County."

Schillerstrom saw the political reality and sought to shift course, in part, in exchange for construction of a western access road, development of a light rail system into the airport and reimbursement for the loss of tax dollars that would result from razing hundreds of homes and businesses.

But while the political puzzle may be coming together for Daley, the economic picture is becoming scrambled. O'Hare's major tenant, United Airlines, declared bankruptcy and can't afford to fund runway realignments and terminal construction. Many industry analysts note O'Hare's other major player, American Airlines, and the rest of the aviation industry, remains in dire financial straits.

The economic downturn may turn out to be the most complicated piece of this puzzle.

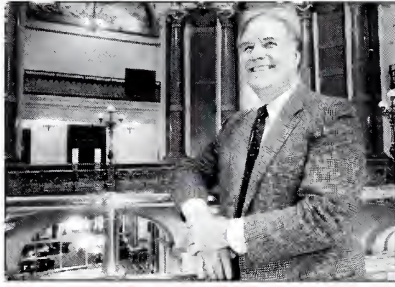
Downstate lawmakers, perhaps many city and suburban legislators too, are not going to give Daley something as big as O'Hare reconfiguration without getting some things in return. With the state budget deficit projected to be \$5 billion and the city already laying off hundreds of workers, neither Daley nor Blagojevich have much to offer. "O'Hare is the mother of all deals," noted one veteran political observer. "You're not going to come up with a deal until you have something to trade with."

It may be some time before top Democrats figure out what they have to offer. Blagojevich still is settling into his own job and filling other important posts. Legislators from all over the state would howl if he were pushing Daley's O'Hare agenda before he filled key jobs and figured his way out of the deficit dilemma. He will make a late budget pitch this month. O'Hare may come up shortly thereafter, or it may take a nationwide economic turnaround before a deal can be broached.

Daley and Blagojevich know they'll retain Democratic control until at least the 2004 election and probably beyond. The mayor has waited decades for the pieces to fall into place. He may have to wait a while longer. □

Madeleine Doubek is metro editor for projects & politics at the Daily Herald, a suburban metro newspaper.

Charles N. Wheeler III



Newly elected leaders have few chances to show they've mastered the switch to governing

by Charles N. Wheeler III

The NCAA men's basketball Final Four showdown is just days away, and the NBA playoffs start in a couple of months.

A key element for successful hoopsters at any level, knowledgeable fans know, is the transition game — how well a team makes the shift from offense to defense and vice versa. Does it get back on defense fast enough to thwart an opponent's fast-break hopes? Is it quick enough going the other way to score easy baskets?

The transition game is important in politics, too, as successful candidates are asked to become competent public officials. But while a basketball team has dozens of times every game to showcase its up-and-down-the-floor skill, newly elected leaders have few chances to show they've mastered the change from campaigning to governing.

The transition seems to have been especially difficult for Gov. Rod Blagojevich. For the first few months of his administration, the Democrat seemed stuck in campaign mode, playing well to the public in news conferences, but stumbling over the nitty-gritty task of running state government.

Blagojevich will have a chance to show his managerial prowess on the 9th of this month, when he is to present his proposed budget for the fiscal year starting July 1. Indeed, he'll deserve accolades as a fiscal genius if he can

Gov. Rod Blagojevich will deserve accolades as a fiscal genius if he can keep his promise to produce a balanced budget, closing what he says is a \$5 billion deficit without cutting vital services or raising income or sales taxes.

keep his promise to produce a balanced budget, closing what he says is a \$5 billion deficit without cutting vital services or raising income or sales taxes.

In his recent State of the State address, though, the former congressman still hadn't mastered the switch, spending as much time on the campaign trail as he did in the governor's office. The governor did attempt to mend fences with lawmakers, some of whom — Democrats included — have resented his frequent sermonizing about the evils of the old ways of doing business in Springfield. Blaming whoever is in office for all the state's ills is sound campaign strategy, of course, but counterproductive once the votes are counted and most of the old cast of characters is back for another turn.

His pious condemnation of such

perks as legislative scholarships and free tickets to Illini games makes for great sound bites for the media, but rankles those who recall Blagojevich availing himself of the same goodies as a state representative from Chicago. And his freeze on pork-barrel projects prompted legislative leaders to remind the governor that the General Assembly is a co-equal branch.

In his address, though, the governor praised each party leader by name and expressed a desire to work together with the legislature to meet the state's challenges. The olive branch was necessary, if he is to achieve his goals.

Much of the speech focused on what Blagojevich called "four basics": jobs, schools, health care and crime. A few new ideas emerged: Internet access and voice mail for teachers and additional unpaid leave so parents can keep up on kids' school progress; a crackdown on club drugs; a new statewide terrorism intelligence center in Springfield.

But he made no mention of the fiscal disaster facing Illinois public school districts, nearly 80 percent of which are operating in the red this year. In fact, most of the initiatives he highlighted echoed campaign proposals. For example, his \$200 million Illinois Opportunity Fund to attract private venture capital, his entrepreneurship centers to nurture start-up companies, his clean coal technology incentives and his support for a higher minimum wage were major components of his

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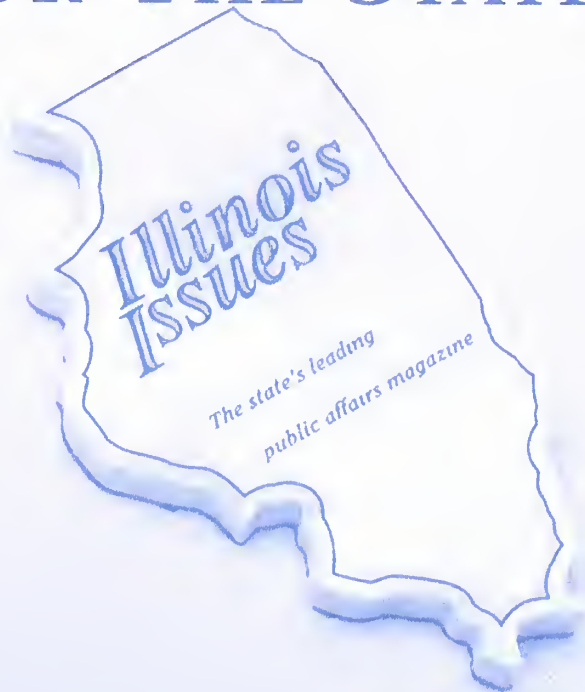
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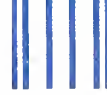
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In like manner, centralizing the state's prescription drug purchases to negotiate lower prices from pharmaceutical houses, creating senior buying clubs and expanding current health care programs for children, the working poor and seniors were key parts of his health care plank.

Blagojevich injected a dose of fiscal reality in several areas, however, scaling back campaign promises to reflect the state's budget woes.

Among crime initiatives, for example, the candidate said doubling to 740 the number of parole agents was "urgently needed" to monitor more closely some 35,000 ex-offenders; the governor plans to hire the extra agents over the next four years. The candidate promised to reopen Sheridan Correctional Center; the governor wants the prison's "gradual reopening" as a model drug offender rehab facility. The estimated \$24 million price tag covers only six months' operations; presumably, costs would double for a full year.

On the education front, the candidate

Blagojevich said his State of the State proposals would cost \$88 million, an investment "we can't afford not to make." But lawmakers in both parties questioned his math.

said he'd provide some 25,000 at-risk children access to preschool education in his first year at a \$90 million cost; the governor said he'll phase in services for those 25,000 over three years, with a first-year cost of \$25 million. The candidate called for \$5,000 scholarships to some 2,500 high-achieving college juniors and seniors who agreed to teach five years in targeted public schools in the first year of his Illinois Future Teacher Corps, at a cost of \$12.5

million; the governor proposed \$4.1 million for the program's first year, enough for 820 scholarships at the most.

All tallied, Blagojevich said his proposals would cost \$88 million, an investment "we can't afford not to make." But lawmakers in both parties questioned his math, and state Treasurer Judy Baar Topinka said the \$88 million figure "strikes me as being awfully low."

The governor's ideas "make me feel all warm and wonderful," added Topinka, the only statewide Republican officeholder and that party's chair, "but they're a long-term commitment, and we always get down to basically how do you pay for them?"

Such dollars-and-cents questions will be answered in his budget message, Blagojevich told reporters. One hopes the speech also shows he's finally made the transition from the campaign trail. □

Charles N. Wheeler III is director of the Public Affairs Reporting program at the University of Illinois at Springfield.

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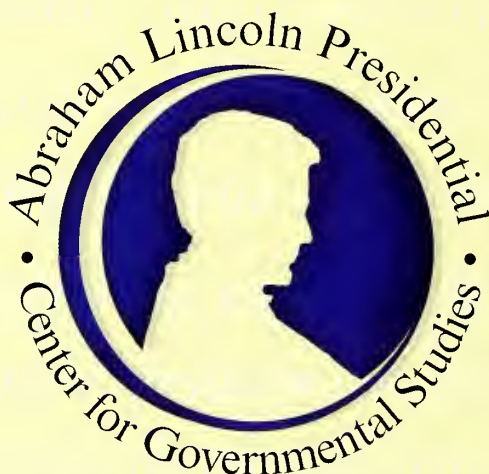
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